

From: Blush1996@aol.com
Sent: Monday, February 27, 2012 12:07 PM
To: Burns, Marlene; Michael Toerge
Subject: Transcript: S. Forster's public comment to 2/23 Planning Comm Study Session

TO: Newport Beach Planning Commissioner Michael Toerge

FROM: Suzanne Forster, Newport Beach resident

Subject: Banning Ranch land use, specifically the landform alterations that will be caused by the remediation, grading, excavating and construction of Banning Ranch.

Dear Commissioner Toerge:

My apologies for running long in my comments at the February 23 Planning Commission Study Session on Land Use, etc. I was told after the session that the clock may have been running even as I was asking for directions about how to use the remote for the Power point presentation. Also, admittedly, I was nervous and wasn't paying as much attention as I might have otherwise to the time constraints. That was my second public comment to the Planning Commission and my first Power point presentation, ever.

Thank you for requesting that I send the transcript of my comments. I've included that here:

"My name is Suzanne Forster. I'm a resident of Newport Beach.

I think everyone agrees that Banning Ranch needs to be cleaned up and transformed into something the public can enjoy for years to come. It's currently a 70-year old oil field operation with a total of 489 wells and the land has been significantly impacted by hydrocarbons from oil crude production.

What people don't realize is that plant life on the ranch is thriving and has restored itself in many areas. The wildlife is thriving too. As it happens, plants are natural remediators of contamination. This is a process scientists call phytoremediation and both the Army Corps of Engineers and the Air Force Center for Engineering and the Environment (AFCEE) use it to help clean up blighted military installations.

Plants are particularly good at cleaning crude oil wastes. The EPA web site has pages of Phytoremediation Success Stories.

As you can see, today's Banning Ranch is largely a beautiful, natural ecosystem. [Slides: lush vegetation, including Encelia where California Gnatcatchers nest; abundant native plants; heron in the wetlands; coyote in the grasslands; upland mesas and arroyos where coyotes and other wildlife make their homes]

[Slide of rainbow on Banning Ranch] Please, take a good long look at this because once the development begins, Banning Ranch will never look this way again. These mesas and arroyos will cease to exist.

If the project is approved, Banning Ranch and the communities that surround it will be subjected to an estimated ten years of grading, excavating, remediating and construction, all facilitated by pollution-spewing heavy equipment. The noise will be intolerable, the air unfit to breathe. Oil field toxins will create health risks for all, but especially children, the elderly and the infirm. Much of the ranch's natural flora will be sacrificed, as well as its wildlife.

According to EQAC, the Environmental Quality Affairs Committee, "excavation on the project site means moving 2,600,000 cubic yards of soil. Cuts will be as deep as 25 feet. Canyons and ridges will be either changed or eliminated. Much of the topography in the area of the project will have permanent soil disturbance [and its] visual character ... will be changed."

Sadly, in order to develop the land, the developers must first destroy much of it. This project is four times as dense as Crystal Cove and larger than the last five big Orange County coastal developments combined.

The developers are going to put 1375 homes, a hotel, commercial space and sports parks on an oil field with 489 wells. When you have families and children living on an oil field in enclosed structures—homes that are subject to toxic vapor intrusions from the contaminants and methane build-up, which is potentially explosive, that's a very dangerous proposition.

By comparison, Open Space Use and remediation of the land requires none of the above. Banning Ranch is a vital and thriving ecosystem right now. It would make an ideal nature preserve and park. The land would continue to remediate itself, aided by whatever bioremediation is necessary to mitigate the heavy damage. Nature trails, an interpretive center and other recreational uses would result in one of the most amazing parks in Orange County. No natural land forms would be destroyed, no wildlife would be lost and none of the natural vegetation would be sacrificed.

The developers say they're doing the community a great service by cleaning up the oil operation. But clearly, Mother Nature is already doing a great job of cleaning up the contaminants. The oil will not destroy nature. Nature, with a little help from us will take care of the contamination. What will destroy nature ... what will destroy Banning Ranch ... what will destroy *this* arroyo [reference to slide] is moving 2,600,000 acres of soil and critical habitat. What will destroy *this* is massive excavation and grading and unearthing of oil field contaminants. What will destroy *this* is ten years of heavy construction, 1375 densely packed homes, a hotel and 75,000 feet of commercial space on what's left of the land after the excavation and grading.

My question is why would any city want to do this to its residents? Why would any city want to impose the kind of crowding, traffic congestion, air pollution, noise pollution, light pollution and long-term health hazards that come with "residential" remediation of an operational oil field? Plants, if they survive the construction—and they won't, how do you survive excavation if you're a plant?—but at least the plants are naturally engineered to deal with contamination. People aren't. People get cancer from that kind of exposure.

So, please, esteemed commissioners, ask yourself these questions as you're reviewing the planning for this project. Thank you."

Suzanne Forster
Newport Beach